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Two Recurrences of an Idea: On Political and Ethical Vicissitudes of Democracy Towards a Politics of Nonviolence

Abstract

In this paper we discuss two different criticisms of liberal democracy. By analyzing the contemporary Slovenian (radical) political thought of Žižek and some of his followers, which recently are revitalizing the “idea of Communism”, we first critically reflect upon the emancipatory potential of this strand of contemporary Slovenian philosophy. The interlude focuses on the uses and logic of violence and pleads for a new politico-ethical culture of non-violence. In the second part of the paper, by approaching Levinas’ ethical criticism of the liberal democracy and by focusing on his concept of a different temporality within political ethics, we discuss some alternative possibilities for the future progress of democracy.

Key words

idea of democracy, idea of communism, Slavoj Žižek, Emmanuel Levinas, emancipatory politics, political ethics, freedom, nonviolence

Introduction

After the events (or *the event*) of 1989, Europe was faced with a new historico-political constellation, or a promise, that by entering the new era of democracy the citizens of ex-Communist SE and Eastern European countries will experience “the free world,” and, in an eschatological sense and fully attuned to Fukuyama’s famous essay from 1989, that the same citizens will finally seal off the era of fear and political insecurity. After only two years this promise was already radically questioned by Alain Badiou in his book *Of an Obscure Disaster* (*D’un désastre obscur*)¹ and followed by philosophers like Slavoj Žižek, by calling the 1989 events with the designation “obscure disaster.” Furthermore, by the same thinkers democracy has been called a “liberal fundamentalism”² and high hopes of the promised post-revolutionary era of liberal democracies too quickly seemed to disappear. Since then the question of politics and political theory concentrates around two blocks or

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Alain Badiou, *D’un désastre obscur. Droit, Etat, Politique* (La Tour d’Aigues: Editions de l’Aube, 1991). Engl. and Serbo-Croatian tr. appeared in 2009 under the title *Of an Obscure Disaster: On the End of State-Truth*, tr. by Barbara P. Fulks (Maastricht: Jan van Eyck Akademie), 2009.

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Slavoj Žižek, ed., *Revolution at the Gates. Žižek on Lenin: The 1917 Writings* (London / New York: Verso, 2004), p. 168.

poles, both critical of democracy, but using radically different vocabularies. The first, relatively uniform camp of thinkers (for example Badiou, Žižek and others) weaved its new identity around the newly revived idea of communism, the second camp aimed at reviving and rescuing the idea and promise of democracy (among them let me only mention, among others, Chantal Mouffe, Jacques Rancière and Jacques Derrida). Within the first camp we even face the notion of an eternal recurrence of the idea of violence as a necessary historico-eschatological *event*, being in accordance with the historical intervention into the world of injustices from the ‘divine’ (Benjamin). ‘Divine violence’ is therefore identified with historical phenomena of past and present, and with our future hopes: according to Žižek (in his book *Violence*) it belongs to the mysterious logic of Event and is related to Love.³ I believe this *double recurrence* (of the ideas of communism with its inherent logic of violence on one side, and the idea of democracy on the other) has something important to do with the radically different understandings of temporality within the political (in the broad sense) as well as with its inherent relation between politics and ethics. I intend, first, to delineate both currents of thought and, in a conclusion, propose the ethical criterion for democracy-to-come (Derrida: *à-venir*).

I The first recurrence: the idea of communism reclaimed

Let us begin with a citation from an influential representative in contemporary Slovenian philosophy. The excerpt is from the paper called “Communism between Death and Resurrection” and addresses Badiou’s works on what is now known as a “Communist hypothesis:”

“To insist on the validity of the Communist hypothesis, namely to consider it as an orientation spot in our search of the exit or in our attempt of breaking it with existing non-egalitarian regimes, means to have a different relationship to the recent more or less unsuccessful attempts in enforcing the communist hypothesis. These are not considered as the evidence for the hypothesis’ invalidity, but as the inability of the previous figures of collective subject of emancipation policy to enforce the hypothesis successfully. Again, according to Badiou, failure in proving the Communist hypothesis does not mean that the hypothesis is invalid, but that the collective subject has in every specific situation and under the conditions that enable the hypothesis to exist in such situation, when facing *problems* in enforcing the Communist hypothesis, adopted the *wrong decision*. The condition for the productivity of failures in proving the hypothesis, which retroactively, after the hypothesis is proven, turn into stages on the path to the solution of the hypothesis, is that during the long-term and wearisome search for the solution, the hypothesis is not rejected, but is, *despite the series of failures*, preserved as the regulative idea or as the notion that enables the mind to focus on searching the solution.”⁴

Before analyzing the excerpt allow me two short remarks. First about the title: it clearly brings to the fore two faces of *one* temporality of selves – namely, the political temporality of past historical events (notably past emancipatory political acts from 1789 to 1968) which at the same moment points to the future of the idea of Communism by infusing it with strong eschatological meaning. It seems that this first temporality *bypasses* the ethical as I will explain and defend it in my following analyses. Second, I understand the characterizing of 1989 with an “obscure disaster” as a sign or an inherent paradox of the politics/political (I do not want to refer to this *difference* here) as understood in Western tradition. This paradox is related to the very scheme of politics being understood either as a Hegelo-Marxism,⁵ or in a broader sense of Carl Schmitt’s concept of the political. If there is a way toward a future culture of *education for the politics of nonviolence* (as I will call it) then it is necessary to follow a different temporality – an ethical one – in which our embodied selves will acknowledge responsibility towards others as an

indispensable element of any political gesture of the past, present and future. Nothing less than a new theory of (inter)subjectivity is needed for this to be accomplished.

Now, let us take a little bit closer look at the above excerpt and its context. What strikes me in this particular reading of Badiou, is the talk about “problems” and “failures” in the course of historical attempts towards its realization. By putting concrete victims of those ‘attempts’ into an *epoché*, this thought is the opposite of what Jean-Luc Nancy understood by the community. To begin from the beginning, for Nancy (following Bataille), means that a radical step has to be taken to bring the subject to the first ethical *gesture* – of one towards the deceased other – in our terms, to the victim(s). This is the first and preminent intrusion of the other into the temporality of the political. It is from here that the rethinking of the political today must begin. Moreover, Nancy contends: we must “allow that communism can no longer be the unsurpassable horizon of our time.”⁶ Nancy chooses the name for this community: it is the democracy.

Politics for both Badiou and Žižek must be a part of the procedure(s) of T/ truth. Once we enter this plane, serious consequences have to be addressed. In one of my previous analyzes of Badiou and Žižek I have tried to discuss the following paragraph from Žižek’s *The Parallax View*:

“... in contrast to Nazism and American capitalism, it was only Soviet Communism which, despite the catastrophe it stands for, *did* possess true inner greatness ... Here we should follow Badiou, who claims that, despite the horrors committed on its behalf (or, rather, on behalf of the specific form of these horrors), Stalinist Communism was inherently related to a Truth-Event (of the October Revolution) while Fascism was a pseudo-event, a lie in the guise of authenticity. Badiou refers here to the difference between *désastre* (the Stalinist ‘ontologization’ of the Truth-Event into a positive structure of Being) and *désêtre* (the Fascist imitation / staging of a pseudo-event called ‘Fascist Revolution’): *mieux vaut un désastre qu’un désêtre* ... Stalinism did not sever the last thread that linked it to civilization. The lowest Gulag inmate still participated in the universal Reason: he had access to Truth of History.”⁷

All is there: Nazism, (Capitalo-)Liberalism and Communism! By reading both excerpts together I think we can already understand their elemental political constellation. We know that Badiou claims “that *communism is the right hypothesis*.”⁸ According to Žižek, we have to begin from the beginning – i.e. we

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Slavoj Žižek, *Nasilje* (Ljubljana: Društvo za teoretsko psihoanalizo, 2007), p. 169. For English translation see Slavoj Žižek, *Violence* (London: Profile Books, 2008).

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Jelica Šumič-Riha, “Komunizem med smrtjo in vstajenjem,” [“Communism between Death and Resurrection”], *Filozofski vestnik*, 30:3 (2009), pp. 75–107 (citation on p. 101; tr. by Tina Čok: my emphases).

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I refer here to an essay of Cornelius Castoriadis “Done and To Be Done”, in: David A. Curtis, ed., *The Castoriadis Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), p. 361: “The idea that an ontology, or a cosmology, might be able to save the revolution belongs to Hegel-Marxism – that is, to a conception as far removed as possible from my own.”

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Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, tr. P. Connor et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. 8. On Nancy’s community see my “On Progressive Alternative: Unger versus Žižek”, *Synthesis philosophica*, 25:1 (2010), pp. 93–100.

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Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006), pp. 285 f. and 291.

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Alain Badiou, *The Meaning of Sarkozy* (London: Verso, 2008), p. 97. For the Communist hypothesis see his “L’hypothèse communiste,” *Circonstances* 5 (Paris: Nouvelles Éditions Lignes, 2009), pp. 181–205.

have “to descend to the starting point and choose a different path.”⁹ For him, this return is closely related to Lenin and is characterized by paraphrasing Beckett’s words from *Worstward Ho*: “Try again, Fail again. Fail better.”¹⁰ Moreover, for Badiou, without the hypothesis, “it is no longer worth doing anything at all in the field of collective action (...) without this Idea, nothing in historical and political becoming is of any interest to a philosopher.”¹¹ As the above excerpt proves, the communist hypothesis should be presented as a regulative idea, but Žižek warns us against such a Kantian or idealistic reading: more radically and more concretely even than Badiou, Žižek insists on communism as a movement, reacting to different social antagonisms. What is returning for him is “Lenin” as a signifier, which is “transforming a series of common notions into a subversive theoretical formation.”¹² But how will we react to those social antagonisms? Žižek basically proposes two procedures: one is – if in plain vulgarity I only repeat after him – “to cut the balls” of our political and economic leaders,¹³ the second is by staying “passive” in regard to the different “activities” (such as intellectual engagement, public discussions, political activism etc.). But in this “passivity” we are already close to what could be designated with the *Event*: in this mode we are close to divine violence understood as an expression of transformative love which mysteriously arises in the course of history. In the *Interlude* I wish to explore some consequences of this constellation.

Interlude: two remarks on the dissipation of violence

a. Counting the bodies

In a paper of Chomsky (it is his sharp criticism of the Courtois’ *Black Book of Communism*) Chomsky draws on Amartya Sen’s analyzes of the 1958–1961 famine in China and endemic undernutrition in India:¹⁴ according to Sen, India’s democracy with its free press and open public discussion was able to prevent catastrophic famines such as occurred in Maoist China. In China we talk about 16,5–29,5 million deaths caused by communist experiments in the 50s and early 60s. But, as Chomsky observes, toward the end of his essay Sen also admits:

“Finally, it is important to note that despite the gigantic size of excess mortality in the Chinese famine, the extra mortality in India from regular deprivation in normal times vastly overshadows the former. Comparing India’s death rate of 12 per thousand with China of 7 per thousand, and applying that difference to the Indian population of 781 million in 1986, we get an estimate of excess normal mortality in India of 3.9 million per year. This implies that every eight years or so more people die in India because of its higher regular death rate than died in China in the gigantic famine of 1958–1961. India seems to manage to fill its cupboard with more skeletons every eight years that China put there in its years of shame.”¹⁵

This opens serious ethico-political questions we will not be able to address here in their entirety. But it is clear that Chomsky uses Sen’s argument to present the relative character of a Maoist experiment (of course Stalinist terror and catastrophic famine in Ukraine of 1932–33 immediately comes to one’s mind with its 6–10 million deaths): for Chomsky, then, the regular death rate in India in its years after independence proves that more people died in post 1950s India than in the entire course of the 20th Century Communist experiment (estimated to reach 100 million since 1917). Capitalism and democracy cause more deaths than Communism. I am convinced that Sen’s intention was not to point to this: throughout his works, Sen’s arguments stand for democracy and its progress toward more freedom, understood in a sense

of a “capabilities approach,” as proposed by him and later by Martha Nussbaum. The basic problem I see in Chomsky is that, despite his insistence that he is not expressing judgments, he is bound to the temporality that I discussed earlier, i.e., the recurrence of the political in a form of Badiou’s exclamation – *mieux vaut un désastre qu’un désêtre*. I think the only possible way of dealing with this difficult question, and perhaps resolving it within the future culture of democracy, is through reflection on violence and the future culture of nonviolence.

b. Sorel’s Reflections on Violence

This brings us to Georges Sorel (1847–1922) and his book *Reflections on Violence*.¹⁶ Sorel’s philosophy brings many issues to the board: they range from ethics to political struggles, but they are always strongly underlined by his idiosyncratic notion of *violence*. Let us first say that violence in Sorel is mainly related to strikes. Now, Sorel’s discussions on proletarian strikes, the revolutionary tradition in France and Russia (up to the 1917 events) are perhaps not so original. Clearly (and rightly, in a way) he is convinced that proletarian violence was fully in line with the historical causes of the revolutionary centuries. But when discussing the very nature of violence, Sorel was willing “to equate it with life, creativity and virtue.”¹⁷ This deserves a more profound exegesis and a commentary. Let us look at his views:

“Not only can proletarian violence ensure the future revolution but it also seems the only means by which the European nations, stupefied by humanitarianism, can recover their former energy (...) Proletarian violence (...) appears thus as a very fine and heroic thing; it is at the service of the immemorial interests of civilization; it is not perhaps the most appropriate method of obtaining immediate material advantages, but it may save the world from barbarism. (...) Proletarian acts of violence (...) are purely and simply acts of war (...) [e]verything in war is carried out without hatred and without the spirit of revenge; in war the vanquished are not killed (...) force is then displayed according to its own nature...”¹⁸

More importantly, when speaking about the contemporary ideals of education, Sorel contends in the chapter “The Ethics of Violence”:

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Slavoj Žižek, “How to Begin from the Beginning,” *New Left Review* 57 (May–June 2009), pp. 43–55. Cit. on p. 51.

¹⁰
Ibid., p. 45.

¹¹
Cited by Žižek in *ibid.*, p. 52.

¹²
Žižek, *Revolution at the Gates*, p. 312.

¹³
This appears in Slovenian version of his essay “To Begin from the Beginning,” in: Slavoj Žižek, *Poskusiti znova – spodleteti bolje*, ed. by P. Klepec (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 2011), p. 438.

¹⁴
Noam Chomsky, “Counting the Bodies,” <http://www.spectrezine.org/global/chomsky.htm> (accessed 13/11/2011). For Sen see: Jean

Dreze and Amartya Sen, “Hunger and Public Action,” in: Niraja Gopal Jayal, ed., *Democracy in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 311–326.

¹⁵
Dreze and Sen, *ibid.*, p. 321.

¹⁶
Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, ed. by J. Jennings (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). The chapters of the book originally appeared in Italian journal *Il Divenire sociale* in 1905 and 1906 and were later published in a book in 1908.

¹⁷
Ibid., p. xxi (Editor’s Introduction).

¹⁸
Ibid., pp. 78, 85 and 106.

“There are so many legal precautions against violence and our education is directed towards so weakening our tendencies toward violence that we are intrinsically inclined to think that any act of violence is a manifestation of a return to barbarism.”¹⁹

All this accounts for an effort of Sorel to build an ethics, suitable to be a ‘legitimate’ companion of the inevitable historical process of class struggle. I strongly believe that this equation of violence with the historical necessities is utterly false precisely because it establishes a nonautonomous subjectivity, subjected to the logic of Hegelo-Marxism (this does not mean that Hegel cannot be read differently as I will indicate later). Within this logic only the recurrence of political in the sense presented by Badiou, Žižek and their followers can appear.

II The second or ethical recurrence: on the vicissitudes of democracy

a. Levinas’s politics

In 1934 the young Levinas wrote an important essay, “Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism.” With its elaboration on Nazism, Communism and Liberalism it is fully in line with our citation from Žižek. But the essay represents an idiosyncratic analysis of the political philosophy of the West, pointing towards what I will try to present as a recurrence of the ethical. In the main question from his prefatory note, written in 1990, Levinas states quite succinctly:

“We must ask ourselves if liberalism is all we need to achieve an authentic dignity for the human subject ... [L]iberalism tends to place the human spirit on a plane that is superior to reality.”²⁰

Levinas had first proposed that Marxism was the first doctrine seriously to break this line of thinking, but, more importantly, he also stated in this essay that it was our task to replace the antagonism(s) of body and spirit with the new experience of our bodies. But I find Levinas’s statement that “the body is closer and more familiar to us than the rest of the world”²¹ as a signpost to the new political philosophy, grounded in ethics and thus toward the *possibility* of new political ethics. But what is important in Levinas’ essay for our context is a new constellation in politics, which builds on a (maternal) *non-expansion of force*. For Levinas, liberalism and its most degenerative form, fascism, have namely both been rooted in the ontology of being and on the will to power. This is why he talks about difficult freedom, beginning anew from our ethical responsibility, grounded in our bodies. This is what I find present in Nancy but not in the constellations as presented in the first part of this paper. But how is it possible to pave the way to this new *subjectivity*, drawing on ethical temporality and a difficult freedom, one different from political freedoms? For Levinas it requires becoming aware of this ‘bondage’ within our being. But let us focus on the core of Levinasian politics: for him politics is war. This is close to Sorel’s elaboration of violence, of course. But this violence is related to something more important – our logic of being or subjectivity. Probably the most influential Levinasian scholar today, Enrique Dussel, succinctly reports on the following passage from Levinas:

“Does not lucidity, the mind’s openness upon the true, consist in catching sight of the permanent possibility of war? The state of war suspends morality.”²²

This structure of ontology (totality, the Same, Truth – even the politics of Truth!) does not permit one, and this is even less possible in politics, to es-

tablish a relation toward the other in an ethical sense. As we have seen in our previous analyses, the politics of Truth and the related logic of the *Event* does not permit one to establish ethical subjectivity, based on responsibility for the other. ‘Truth’ and ‘event’, in politics, both put subjectivity – through divine violence, or ‘Love,’ as in Žižek – into an ethical *epoché* and thus only apparently break the ontological necessity inherited from the past and now transferred to the future. *Difference* in the ethical sense is not established. Victoria Tahmasebi states in her analysis of Levinas’ politics the following:

“Levinas argues that in the ethical relationship a temporality arises in which the dimensions of the past and the future have their own signification ... In diachronic or ethical time, which Levinas contrasts to the time of essence, the future is not an event already awaiting me ... My explanation for the other requires that I cross the threshold of linear time and encounter another modality of time, for even though I did not participate in the past suffering of the other, I am still responsible to that past.”²³

This is diachronical time, contrasted to the time of essence. Levinas has inherited it from Nietzsche’s philosophy. I argue that it is precisely here that a possibility of new political ethics resides. In the first part of this paper we have called this the intrusion of the other into the temporality of politics, or into the politics of Truth. This intrusion has a name: ethical responsibility. This is what breaks the logic of presence/present, in which the other is the means for the same.²⁴ If we follow this new logic further, the event of recurrence occurs: the body appearing in front of me, with its heartbeat, breathing – all this testifies to a different temporality, coming-to-be in front of me, in every moment. Perhaps this is the truth of eternal recurrence in Nietzsche. In all this resides the first break with the Western political tradition, residing in contracts, struggles and violence. And as we have seen earlier it is Benjamin (and after him Žižek) that believes in divine violence.²⁵ Divine violence is “the only power that is able to call a halt to the war of all against all or to stop pure destruction”²⁶ and as such it is the only educative (sic!) power which expiates without guilt or retribution. In this light of its (also) revolutionary potential, as Žižek states in his book *Violence*, the commandment “You shall not murder” is a Kantian regulative idea. Of course Žižek is not naïve: he knows perfectly well that this violence *does not* correspond to any historical necessity, as understood by some revolutionaries or totalitarian regimes, or individuals in the service of an idea. Yet, it is a violence, which expiates as a *work of Love* of a subject. For Žižek, following Che Guevara and Kierkegaard’s reading of the commandment “love your enemy,” we must “love with the hatred.”²⁷ Pure violence corresponds to pure love. But to conclude

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Ibid., p. 175.

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Emmanuel Levinas, “Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism,” tr. S. Hand, in: Asher Horowitz & Gad Horowitz, eds., *Difficult Justice: Commentaries on Levinas and Politics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), pp. 3 and 6.

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Ibid., p. 8.

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Ibid., p. 79. The excerpt is from *Totality and Infinity*, tr. A. Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), p. 21.

23
Ibid., p. 175 (ch. “Levinas, Nietzsche and Benjamin’s ‘Divine Violence’”).

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Cf. *ibid.*, p. 174f.

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Walter Benjamin, “Critique of Violence,” in: Bruce B. Lawrence and Aisha Karim, eds., *On Violence: A Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press: 2007), pp. 268–285.

26
A. Horowitz & G. Horowitz, eds., *Difficult Justice*, p. 184.

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Žižek, *Nasilje*, pp. 169–170.

this part: in her interpretation of Levinas, Victoria Tahmasebi recalls Levinas' words from one of his interviews: surprisingly it is Lenin, which also for Levinas could testify to an impossible as a testimony for a radical break in our time. Moreover, she interprets Levinas' modality of "beyond being" as being structurally identical to Benjamin's divine violence and it is difficult to oppose her interpretation. There is a mysterious ethical limit present in Levinas' notion of the political.²⁸

b. Towards the politics of nonviolence

Let us now look at the following excerpt:

"Your blood has been split in Palestine and Iraq, and the horrific image of the massacre in Qana in Lebanon is still fresh in people's minds. The massacres that have taken place in Tajikistan, Burma, Kashmir, Assam, the Philippines, Fatani, Ogadin, Somalia, Eritrea, Chechnya and Bosnia Herzegovina send shivers down our spines and stir up our passions."²⁹

If we follow the logic of divine violence in its fullness, is this then a 'legitimate' call and are violent acts that follow from it therefore justified? Žižek affirms: divine violence is not objective, but subjective (does not Bin Laden refer to his emotions?), it is historical and related to our utmost responsibility for the "just" cause, that no one can take from us and do for us, then those suppressed by divine violence are guilty, and finally, *You shall not kill any person from the Koran (17:33)* is only understood as Kantian regulative idea. *To kill a human being is not a crime.*³⁰

Perhaps we are perplexed now. First, to be clear: I agree with in my opinion the most important Levinasian and neo-Marxian philosopher of our age, Enrique Dussel, when he writes about the city of Babylon, "whose ruins are near the present Bagdad, destroyed by the barbarians at the beginning of the twentieth-first century."³¹ But I think we can find an answer to this question in a short but extremely important book *Indignes vous!*, a book written by Stephane Hessel: in this important book Hessel devotes a chapter to nonviolence and his vision of a peaceful coexistence is something that has been radically forgotten in political theory of today. Referring to Sartre and his affirmative thoughts on terrorism (according to Sartre the only way to stop violence is by being violent) – Hessel adds: nonviolence is certainly a more effective way of stopping violence.³² In the concluding part of this paper I will thus argue that it is only within the culture of democracy that we can search for this aim. We have seen that it is in Levinas that the first intrusion of the other into our world has happened. This must now be developed further within the very idea of democracy and understood as its emerging ethical core.

To return to Hessel: he replaces violence with hope. This is a very important thought. For coming towards education for nonviolence, and for getting to the future culture of democracy, we must affirm that subjectivity must be built anew. As a pragmatist today I will not elaborate on Dewey's democratic ideal. But I wish to note that his idea of democracy is basically what I find to be the most important intervention into politics after Marx and is of course present in one way or another in all my elaborations on democracy. Dewey once wrote – and this is what Hessel wanted to say in his chapter on a peaceful rebellion:

"To take as far as possible every conflict which arises ... out of the atmosphere and medium of force, of violence as a means of settlement, into that of discussion and of intelligence is to treat those who disagree – even profoundly – with us as those from whom we may learn, in so far, as friends."³³

This is a description of a world where there are no enemies! Although this thought is simple and already present in the *New Testament* (“The Parable of the Good Samaritan,” Lk 10:25–37) and later in Nietzsche,³⁴ it is far from being recognized within political theory. Now there were some attempts to reconnect the ethical and the political in the recent past: clearly Gandhi comes to one’s mind with his politics of *swaraj*, i.e. self-rule based on absolute non-violence and truth (*ahimsa* and *satyagraha*). But his thought consists of an internal paradox: it is violent toward oneself (i.e. his ideal of chastity/austerity) and does not affirm full autonomy of the human being. In the present age Fred Dallmayr, for example, develops Deweyan democracy as a promise and Luce Irigaray develops her idiosyncratic project of democratic education, based on nonviolence.³⁵ Needless to say, this thinking is experimental and needs a great amount of imagination, stemming from the authonomous, or “ethical” subjectivity. I will draw on these aspects to present a possibility for democratic education for nonviolence.

We all know thinkers such as Chantal Mouffe, Jacques Rancière, Ernesto Laclau, Jean-Luc Nancy, Claude Lefort and Jacques Derrida of course (and many others), showing their affinities and hopes related to the idea of demo-

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Here I cannot fully explore this topic but according to Tahmasebi, Benjamin’s divine violence affirms “to the possibility of an alternative communal space-time separate from the state power and, more specifically, from the Hobbesian liberal capitalist state.” (*Difficult Justice*, p. 184) It would be necessary at some other place to show the ethical consequences of a such reading of Levinas together with Benjamin. According to Levinas: “If self-defense is a problem, the ‘executioner is the one who threatens my neighbor and, in this sense, calls for violence and no longer has a Face,” Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre Nous*, tr. Michael B. Smith (London: Continuum, 2006), p. 90. On the topic of violence in Levinas see also the essay “Judaism and Revolution” from *Nine Talmudic Readings* and Derrida’s essay “Violence and Metaphysique” from his *Writing and Difference*.

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Osama bin Laden, “Declaration of War Against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places: Expel the Polytheists from the Arabian Peninsula (August 23, 1996),” in: *On Violence: A Reader*, p. 540.

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About the perception of violence in Islam: generally in Islam there is a kind of consensus that violence is to be avoided except for ‘just cause’ – but that can be interpreted in a very narrow or broad sense, and its often a matter of perception as much as dispassionate reasoning. There is a preponderance of seeing Jihad in ‘defensive’ terms; radical Islamists would be able to condone 9/11 because of their perception of the Muslim world being under seige of the West, and the attacks could then be interpreted as a defensive posture

(e.g. as an act of divine violence), while other Muslims (the vast majority) condemn it as a terrorist act, not just ‘un-Islamic’, but putting the perpetrators beyond the pale of Islam altogether. I thank Carol Kersten for his elaborations on this topic.

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Enrique Dussel, “From Fraternity to Solidarity,” *Journal of Social Philosophy*, 38:1 (Spring 2007), p. 87.

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Stephane Hessel, *Dvignite se!* (Ljubljana: Sanje, 2011), p. 39. See S. Hessel, *Indignez-vous! essay* (Montpellier: Indigène, 2010).

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Cit. after Fred Dallmayr, “Liberal Democracy and its Critics,” in: Akeel Bilgrami, ed., *Democratic Culture: Historical and Political Essays* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2011), p. 18. Dewey’s words are from his essay “Creative Democracy – The Task Before Us” from 1939.

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Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human All Too Human*, tr. R. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 149: “Enemies, there are no enemies!”

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See Dallmayr, “Liberal Democracy and its Critics.” For Irigaray see her *Democracy Begins Between Two* (It. *La democrazia comincia a due*, 1994) and more recent paper “There Can Be No Democracy Without a Culture of Difference,” in: Axel Goodbody and Kate Rigby, eds., *Ecocritical Theory* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2011), pp. 194–205.

cracy in one of its modalities, and testifying to the role of difference between ‘the political’ (*le politique*) and negatively judged ‘politics’ (*la politique*).³⁶ But in order to return to democracy, ethically, and to take seriously the path towards a future culture of nonviolence, more is needed than the affirmation of political difference. I think of a problematic relation between subjectivity, inherited from the tradition of Western philosophy with political philosophy included. To underpin my claim I will only mention two in my opinion excellent observations: Seyla Benhabib rightly observes that

“[p]ostmodernist skepticism toward “really existing Western democracies” and at times the naively apologetic confirmation of western capitalism and democracy by their new aspirants are contemporaries of our current political and cultural horizon.... [T]heorists of difference have not indicated where the line is to be drawn between forms of difference which foster democracy and forms of difference which reflect anti-democratic aspirations.”³⁷

For her it is essential that any politics of difference (or of the “differend”) stay within the democratic horizon. The same argument is presented by Stephen K. White as follows:

“No postmodern thinkers I know of would give blanket endorsement to the explosions of violence associated with, say, the resurgence of ethnic group nationalism in the Soviet Union or with the growth of street gangs in Los Angeles. And yet it is not at all clear that they have a normative discourse available to condemn such violence.”³⁸

It is important to note the intention of Benhabib here: she knows precisely that dealing with political philosophy and democracy is (ethically) a subtle matter. It is something that is deeply associated with the idea of ‘humanity’ and it is much less important which theoretical consequences one could develop from it. What I mean with the ‘theoretical’ is a search for an “originary or foundational political act”³⁹ or some other metapolitical act, which is posited instead of a search for the best hopes and promises, based on the ongoing process and tradition of emancipation and growth. In this process the logic of subjectivity went through immense changes and it is still not clear if our Western democracies and political traditions have fully opened the plane for an ethical subjectivity, based on nonviolence.

Conclusion

I would like to sum up my previous arguments and propose a possible path to ethical subjectivity, based on my previous readings. We have seen that it was Levinas who opened up the very possibility for an ethical recurrence of the other – as a Face in front of me which is a calling out to me, in other words, an ethical responsibility. His elaborations on the body are also crucial for the turn toward the ‘spiritual’ awakening needed in our times. Not to be committed to the body is a betrayal for him. I think that the limit, that we noticed in Levinas, is structurally related to the inherent logic of his thought: by affirming that the perpetrator “no longer has a Face” and that “[t]here is a certain measure of violence necessary in terms of justice,”⁴⁰ he testifies to an ethico-political constellation which logically still dwells in the vicinity of the ontological tradition and “nihilism.” Levinas cannot suppress the “original sin” of our civilization: a need of the human being to appropriate the other in one way or another.⁴¹ The task of today must be what Irigaray designates as a double gesture of regrounding singular identity and regrounding community constitution.⁴² This double task, for her, requires us to enter a path of shared becoming of which the result can only be love. In this process, the relation is grounded on two autonomous persons and opposed to Western dialectic,

which includes the logic of competition, strength, force and violence, being in its entirety the testimony for “an uncultivated energy that society is no longer able to channel or control.”⁴³ This is a return to the culture that we tragically forgot for centuries, day after day.

One may only hope that this ethical recurrence will predominate in the future search for the new culture of democracy.

Lenart Škof

Dva povratka jedne ideje: O političkim i etičkim nestalnostima demokracije

Prema politici nenasilja

Sažetak

U ovom radu razmatramo dvije različite kritike liberalne demokracije. Kroz analizu suvremene slovenske (radikalne) političke misli Slavoj Žižeka i nekih njegovih sljedbenika, koji u zadnje vrijeme revitaliziraju »ideju komunizma«, prvo ćemo kritički promisliti emancipacijski potencijal ove struje suvremene slovenske filozofije. Interludij se fokusira na uporabe i logiku nasilja te se zalaže za novu političko-etičku kulturu nenasilja. U drugome dijelu rada, uzimajući u obzir Levinasovu etičku kritiku liberalne demokracije i fokusirajući se na njegov pojam različite vremenitosti unutar političke etike, razmotrit ćemo neke alternativne mogućnosti za budući napredak demokracije.

Ključne riječi

ideja demokracije, ideja komunizma, Slavoj Žižek, Emmanuel Levinas, emancipacijska politika, politička etika, sloboda, nenasilje

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The first to elaborate on this paradox was Paul Ricœur in his 1974 essay “The Political Paradox.” See on this in Oliver Marchart, *Die politische Differenz* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2010).

37

Seyla Benhabib, “Democracy & Difference,” *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (1994), pp. 1–23. Cit. on p. 3.

38

Ibid., p. 4. The citation is from the book of Stephen K. White *Political Theory and Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 133. Jacques Rancière, for example, is also very clear about this: “I am not the thinker of the event ... I believe there are traditions of emancipation. The one I try to work on, or work in, is different from the one that got confiscated by the strategic visionaries, Lenin and the like. I’ve always fought against the idea of historical necessity” (Jacques Rancière, “Democracies against Democracy – An Interview with Eric Hazan,” in: *Democracy in What State?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 79f. In this Rancière is close to Dewey or

Habermas’ model of universal pragmatics: he affirms there were some historical “events” that opened up temporalities, but more importantly, democracies also grow in an “ongoing effort to create forms of the common different from ones on offer from the state” (ibid.). Benhabib, on the other side, pleads for the deliberative model of democracy.

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Cf. ibid., p. 5.

40

Levinas, *Entre Nous*, p. 90.

41

Cf. Luce Irigaray, “Die Vermittlung des anderen,” in: Brigitta Keintzel and Burkhard Liebsch, eds., *Hegel und Levinas* (München: Verlag Karl Alber, 2010), pp. 171–203.

42

Luce Irigaray, *Between East and West*, tr. Stephen Pluháček (New Delhi: New Age Books, 2005), p. 3.

43

Irigaray, “There Can Be No Democracy Without a Culture of Difference,” p. 196.

Lenart Škof

**Zweifache Wiederkehr einer Idee:
über politische und ethische Unbeständigkeiten der Demokratie**

In Richtung Politik der Gewaltlosigkeit

Zusammenfassung

In diesem Artikel besprechen wir zwei differente Kritikarten der liberalen Demokratie. Indem wir den kontemporären slowenischen (radikalen) politischen Gedanken Žižeks sowie einiger seiner Getreuen erörtern, die letztendlich die „Idee des Kommunismus“ revitalisieren, denken wir eingangs kritisch nach über das emanzipative Potenzial dieses Strangs der zeitgenössischen slowenischen Philosophie. Das Interludium richtet seine Aufmerksamkeit auf den Gebrauch bzw. die Logik der Gewalt und plädiert für eine neuartige politisch-ethische Kultur der Gewaltfreiheit. In dem zweiten Teil des Papers – indem wir an Levinas' ethischen Kritizismus gegenüber der liberalen Demokratie herangehen und uns auf dessen Auffassung der andersgearteten Zeitlichkeit innerhalb der politischen Ethik fokussieren – prüfen wir einzelne Alternativmöglichkeiten für den Zukunftsfortschritt der Demokratie.

Schlüsselwörter

Idee der Demokratie, Idee des Kommunismus, Slavoj Žižek, Emmanuel Levinas, emanzipative Politik, politische Ethik, Freiheit, Gewaltlosigkeit

Lenart Škof

**Deux retours d'une idée :
sur les vicissitudes politiques et éthiques de la démocratie**

Vers une politique de non-violence

Résumé

Dans cet article, nous examinons deux critiques différentes de la démocratie libérale. En analysant la pensée politique (radicale) slovène contemporaine de Slavoj Žižek et de certains de ces adeptes, qui ces derniers temps redonnent un nouveau souffle à « l'idée du communisme », nous allons d'abord réfléchir de manière critique sur le potentiel émancipatoire de ce courant de la philosophie slovène contemporaine. La partie intermédiaire se concentre sur l'emploi ainsi que sur la logique de la violence et plaide pour une nouvelle culture politico-éthique de non-violence. Dans la deuxième partie de cet article, nous allons discuter – en abordant la critique éthique par Levinas de la démocratie libérale et en nous concentrant sur sa notion d'une temporalité différente à l'intérieur de l'éthique politique – de quelques possibilités alternatives pour le progrès futur de la démocratie.

Mots-clés

idée de démocratie, idée du communisme, Slavoj Žižek, Emmanuel Levinas, politique émancipatoire, éthique politique, liberté, non-violence